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REFORMER

They dealt with a great variety of subjects, political, literary, and social, and show how wide was the interest which Zola took in the affairs of his time. One of them on Victor Hugo and his poem "L'Ane" caused a sensation, for most people deemed it positive sacrilege to attack the greatest literary glory of the age. The uproar was even heard across the channel, and Mr. Swinburne, who admired "L'Ane," and held Zola to be mere "stench," manifested particular indignation. But a quarter of a century has elapsed since then, and it is a question whether many people would be inclined nowadays to regard "L'Ane" as a great poem. In a sense, Zola's attack was unkind, but it was essentially one on fetish worship, on the habit of lavishing indiscriminate praise on everything, good, bad, or indifferent, that might come from the pen of a writer of eminence. Let us remember that there has never yet been a poet of whom one might say his every line is a masterpiece. Homer nodded, so did Hugo, and so has even Mr. Swinburne himself.

Some of Zola's articles in "Le Figaro" dealt with his own work; others with that of his friends G-oncourt, Huysmans, Maupassant, and Daudet; but several were political — attacks on Gambetta and so forth, written

in the same spirit which had prompted the article on Hugo. Gambetta, as will be remembered, had now (1880-1881) reached the crisis of his life. The Tunisian debt scandal, the frauds of the Union Ge'ne'rale, — a Catholic bank established with the papal blessing for the purpose of wresting financial power from the Jews, — were associated by some folk with his "great ministry." Besides, his proposals for changing the electoral system, his patronage of reactionary generals,